



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union

Skopje, 5 May 2016

EU supports creation of media networks for press freedom (Hotel Holiday Inn)

Speaking points
Ambassador Aivo Orav
Head of the EU Delegation

Dear journalists, ladies and gentlemen,

Independent, pluralistic and **free press is essential for democracy** of any nation and for the well-being of the people.

The World Press Freedom Day is probably the best occasion to remind ourselves of these words. They are the basis of a declaration that was adopted 25 years ago at a UNESCO seminar in Namibia. The date of its adoption became the World Press Freedom Day.

Twenty five years later, unfortunately, challenges regarding the press freedom remain all over the globe, including in the EU. Challenges in the country here, as we have repeatedly noted, are serious.

The EU keeps on top of its agenda the freedom of expression, no matter if it is about its member states or any other country. This freedom is inextricably linked to democracy. It is a key component of democratic governance.

The **challenges** in your country are numerous. There is lack of balanced and fair reporting. There is self-censorship of journalists. Journalists do not have fully ensured access to public information. The regulatory body needs to further demonstrate its role and independence. Financing of media is

not sufficiently transparent. The community of journalists is divided instead of jointly defending its own interests. One can also hear hate speech in media without any follow up by the state institutions. Recently, the Freedom House organisation qualified the country as 'non free' regarding the press freedom.

This situation needs to change. We all know that people need to be fully informed to be able to form an opinion and participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Freedom of information also enhances transparency in public affairs and can be used as a **tool to make governments accountable** for their actions. In particular, when **access to information results in the exposure of human rights violations or corruption practices.**

The project that we are promoting today is aimed to contribute to that change. It is meant to bring about more favourable environment for journalists' work, more professional reporting, strengthened solidarity among journalists and higher awareness about freedom of expression. The EU allocated almost 200,000 euros for this three year-project. However, the Association of Journalists is also taking part in another EU-funded project. It involves six regional journalistic associations that jointly advocate for implementation of EU standards for media freedoms. The assistance provided for the media sphere in the country so far amounts to 2.7M euros.

Dear journalists, ladies and gentlemen,

The EU is committed to further promoting and protecting freedom of opinion and expression worldwide. Any intimidation and violence on individuals for exercising the right to freedom of opinion online and offline is unacceptable. So are laws or practices that impose censorship, encourage self-censorship or provide legal penalties.

The EU, as Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Oettinger put it recently, will 'continue to do whatever is in our power to protect and enhance media freedom and pluralism in Europe. It is the quality of democracy that is at stake here'. While doing this, we should bear in mind that freedoms of opinion and expression are a right. A right to be exercised by everyone everywhere, based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and universality. This is your Right!

Thank you for your attention.